

My Brother Sam is Dead

Christopher Collier & James Lincoln Collier

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CONTEXT

My Brother Sam is Dead begins in 1775, when the New England colonies were just beginning to join forces in rebellion against their ruler, the mighty British government. Since their founding, the colonies had paid taxes to the king of England, retained many British customs, and often followed the Anglican religion. By the time when this story takes place, the movement for independence had begun to spread through the land, gaining great following at the universities, including Yale, where the fictional character Sam Meeker is a student. The Boston Tea Party had happened, exciting the rebel Patriots and offending the Tories, New England men who remained loyal to England. The colonies were beginning to divide in their loyalty. The makeshift rebel militia, the Minutemen, rose under the leadership of George Washington and defeated the British forces in the battle of Lexington and Concord, an event Sam notes in chapter one. Even with so much pro-Patriot sentiment, Redding, Connecticut, where the Meekers live, was a Tory town. It is a historical fact that Redding inhabitants endured aggression and the stealing of their guns and cattle, partly out of wartime desperation for goods, and partly out of animosity toward the Loyalists.

This novel was written to recreate a particular moment in the Civil War from the viewpoint of a child. The novel is sometimes offensive; when Tim Meeker describes the seating in the church, he notes without judgment that the balcony is where those deemed lesser humans sit— children, black people, and Indians. Women defer to the judgment of their husbands, and therefore when Tim returns to help his mother run the tavern, he acts as the master of the property.

This novel questions the usefulness of war as an answer to social problems. At the end of the novel, Tim asks us whether such a nation could be created from an end other than war. *My Brother Sam is Dead* demonstrates the repercussions of war on a single involved family, and through this suggests the possible effects on each other group of individuals. But overall, this novel does not carry an antiwar message so much as it details the maturation of a boy who adores and idolizes his older brother, and how the wartime situation brought out the younger brother's abilities and principles in contrast to those of the older.

The authors of this novel take many of their characters from history. A Meeker Tavern did exist in Redding, and many of the city inhabitants lived and died in the same manner that they do in the novel. In an epilogue, the brothers Christopher Collier and James Lincoln Collier explain their endeavor to recreate the effects of war on this Tory family. James Collier writes many children's books and magazine articles, and Christopher is a professor specializing in the history of the American Revolution.

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**SUMMARY**

When Sam Meeker returns home from college in the spring of 1775 and announces that he has decided to enlist in the Rebel army, his parents are appalled, but his younger brother, Tim, is wide-eyed with admiration. When the brothers are outside together doing chores around their family's tavern, Sam confides in Tim his plan to steal their father's gun in order to fight. Tim protests, but he can do nothing to stop Sam. That night, Mr. Meeker and Sam have an argument about the war and Sam runs away from home. The next morning after church, Tim visits Sam in a hut where he is hiding out. He tries to talk Sam out of going to war, but without success. In the hut, Sam's girlfriend Betsy Read asks Tim which side he supports, and Tim has trouble deciding between his Father's loyalty to the British government and his brother's loyalty to the idea of an independent nation. He does not answer. Sam leaves, and after several months Betsy notifies Tim that Sam has returned. Tim finds an excuse to visit his brother when Rebel soldiers enter his house and violently demand his father's gun, which is with Sam. Tim runs to Sam's hideout, steals the gun and runs, but is soon over taken by Sam. Together they return to the house and find that their parents have been spared.

Time passes and a neighbor, Mr. Heron, stops by the tavern and asks Tim to deliver some letters for him. Tim's father says no, but Tim, hoping for a taste of the kind of adventure that Sam is having, sneaks away to do it. While he is walking down the street with the letter in hand, Betsy sees the letter and wrestles it away, convinced that it contains spy information on Sam (it does not). Tim spends the summer around the tavern and then he goes on a trading journey with his father to Verplancks Point, his first trip away from home and his first encounter with his cousins. On the way there they are stopped by "cow-boys," Rebel roadside terrorists, who harass them a bit. On the way back Tim's father is kidnapped by the same cow-boys. Tim outsmarts them, saves himself, and has to bring the wagon of goods home on his own. Because of this experience, he matures overnight and takes control of the maintenance of the tavern, excited about impressing Sam with his new knowledge and competency.

In the spring of 1777, British soldiers troop into the Meeekers' hometown of Redding, Connecticut, and Tim watches as they ruthlessly kill men and boys, including one of his own close friends. He has trouble deciding where his loyalty lies. The Rebels have kidnapped his father, yet the British are plundering his town. The day the British come through, the Rebel troops follow, and Tim is able to see his brother. They reunite happily and Tim learns that Sam has decided to reenlist. Tim disapproves, but he realizes that arguing will not change Sam's mind.

Several months later, Tim and his mother hear the news that his father has died on a prison ship. Now Tim truly becomes the man of the house, taking care of his mother and

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the tavern and making financial and trading decisions. Tim must decide what to do with the eight cows he and his mother have received as payment for their tavern goods. He wants to sell them for a profit. Sam returns to Redding with his troops and advises Tim to kill the cows and hide the meat so as to prevent cattle theft, but Tim is hesitant. Eventually, two men try to steal the cows from the barn, and when Sam runs out to stop them, the men grab him and frame him as the cattle thief. Since cattle stealing has been a problem in the armed forces, General Putnam is determined to make an example out of somebody. Both Tim and his mother talk to the rebel officers, pleading Sam's innocence, but the general will not change his mind. Tim tries to break into the encampment and save his brother, but nothing comes of it. On February 16, 1779, Tim looks on as Sam is publicly shot.



CHARACTER LIST

Tim Meeker—The narrator, he is fourteen at the beginning of the story. Tim greatly admires his older brother and longs to be more involved in the excitement and danger of the war.

Sam Meeker—Tim's older brother, he is sixteen at the beginning of the story. Sam is headstrong and often at odds with his father. A Yale student, he leaves school to fight the rebel cause and is ultimately framed as a cattle thief and shot publicly.

Eliphalet Meeker—Father to Sam and Tim, he is the owner of Meeker Tavern. Mr. Meeker wants nothing to do with the war and is angry at Sam for participating in it.

Susannah Meeker—Mother to Sam and Tim, she is very religious and hard working.

Betsy Read—Sam's girlfriend and the daughter of Colonel Read, a prominent local Patriot. Betsy is a bold, nosy teenaged girl, very loyal to Sam and to the Rebel cause, even though she, like all women, is forbidden to get involved.

Colonel Read—Betsy's father, he is a staunch and aging Patriot.

Tom Warrups—An Indian living on Colonel Read's land who allows Sam to hide out in his teepee.

Jerry Sanford—A young local boy and a friend of Tim's, he is captured by the British and dies on a prison ship.

Mr. Beach—An elderly, loyalist preacher.

Mr. Heron—A wealthy and somewhat shadowy local character, he claims to be a Tory but probably works for both sides. Heron asks Tim to relay a letter for him.

Benedict Arnold—He is captain of the Governor's Second Foot Guard, Sam's company.

General Putnam—The leader of the Rebels staying in Redding, he is a rigid and unemotional man who sentences Sam to death as an example to the rest of the troops.

Colonel Parsons—One of Sam's officers in Redding, he is slightly more sympathetic than General Putnam.

Mr. Platt—Tim and Sam's uncle in New Salem.

Ezekiel Platt—Sam and Tim's cousin in New Salem. Ezekiel's family hosts Tim and his father when they travel to Verplancks Point.

Captain Betts—A local Patriot who is captured and then released by the British.

Captain Starr—A local Patriot who is killed by the British.

Ned—A local black man who is beheaded by the British.

Dr. Hobart—The Redding doctor.

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**ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS****Tim Meeker**

Tim, the narrator, stands just on the brink of adolescence. During the course of the story, he watches the older and more experienced people around him and wonders which their ideals he should take as his own. Tim is frightened of his father, who is a powerful, all-knowing force in the Meeker household. This fear is balanced and at times outweighed by Tim's adoration of his older brother Sam, who is everything Tim wants to grow up to be. Throughout the novel, Tim considers the opposing influences of his brother and father and chisels out a sensibility of his own. Tim is a clever, hard-working, and introspective boy, and he often takes quiet, intelligent paths through trying situations, as opposed to his father and brother, who share a boldness and impetuousness. Both Mr. Meeker and Sam suffer grave consequences as a result of their boldness. Up until the end of his brother's life, Tim is determined to prove himself to Sam in everything he does, whether with his cleverness in the face of the cow-boys or his mature ability to run the tavern. Tim's desire to impress his brother and also forge himself in contrast to his role models pervades the novel. Tim's struggle to grow up during the war parallels the new nation's struggle to break free from the forces ruling it, while at the same time preserve some of its mother country's more cherished and indispensable influences.

Sam Meeker

As Tim's older and only brother, Sam is admired by Tim for everything he is and does. Sam's stories of college glory are bedtime stories for a rapt Tim. Sam is aware of this attention and enjoys being the center of it. His decision to join the war is appropriate to his personality, since he is one who loves to compete, whether in college debates or in heated arguments with his equally fiery father. Sam also craves the glory of being part of something great and worthy of talk and admiration. He is full of advice and pride, acting with a casual ease that he knows Tim envies, ready for adventure and drama and not stopping to worry about the people who are at home worrying about him. Sam's decision to enlist can be attributed partly to teenage rebellion, and greatly to his desire for adventure and involvement. Sam is the center of Tim's first person story and the worry on everybody's mind when the war comes into conversation, as it often does. Sam's girlfriend, brother, parents, and even the town preacher speak of him on a regular basis, partly because he has a forceful and recognizable personality, and also because he is fighting for the underdog, the rebel army, a decision which is not highly respected in his primarily Tory hometown. But Sam grins when he speaks of the dirtiness and lack of food, and he seems to feel glad that he can speak from

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firsthand experience of the deaths and blood of the war. At the end, Sam dies as he lives, bravely, publicly, and watched closely by his younger brother.

Father

Father is the older, wiser, more conservative force guiding Tim, and he always winds up arguing with Sam. Mr. Meeker experienced war in his younger years and has no interest in ever involving himself with it again, and although he opposes treason toward the British monarchy, he does not necessarily side with the Loyalists. He simply pleads disinterest and goes on running his tavern, selling his goods, trading at Verplancks once a year, and not caring who eats his goods so long as he can make a living. He is stubborn, like Sam, and often hotheaded, but he has an aged cautiousness that Sam does not live long enough to cultivate. Mr. Meeker simply does not want himself or his family placed in harm's way. When Sam announces his plan to fight, Father banishes him from the house until he loses his uniform, and then sits down to cry. Mr. Meeker loves his family but guides them with very strict principles based on safety, economics, and morality. Mr. Meeker's wife, Susannah, bases her life more on religious principles. In the first chapter when Sam arrives home, the first thing Father says is to shut the door, and Tim notes, "That's the way Father was—do right first, and then be friendly."

**THEMES, MOTIFS, SYMBOLS**

Themes

The Illusion of Glory

Tim recognizes that Sam is remaining in the war for the glory and camaraderie rather than for the principle of it, and after several of his own attempts at glory and adventure, Tim senses that glory is overrated. The sacrifices and risks are too great, as they are in the delivery of Mr. Heron's letter or the trip to Verplancks Point. The so-called glory of adventure has taken away Father and many others, and Tim avoids it, partly because he is younger and must tend the house, and partly because he sees its effects on Sam. In the end, Tim learns that glorying in battle can lead to early death, and avoiding the glory of war can lead to a long, happy life.

The Degeneration of Values During War

Mother repeats many times how war turns men into beasts. She says this, for example, when she hears of Jerry Sanford's death, or of Sam himself stealing cattle to feed his men. She is correct in saying this, and not only in the sense of human cruelty. As the war wears on, the entire source of the conflict fades and everybody becomes an enemy to everyone else. Tim finds solace in neither the Rebels nor the Tories; neither stick to principles or any sort of noble idea other than desperate and efficient murder. Tim never chooses a side, and this is extremely important to the novel in demonstrating that to an unbiased and observant young boy, neither side has stuck to any set of values or done anything particularly admirable that would warrant loyalty. By the end of the story, Tim points out that nobody really cares who wins as long as the war ends soon.

The Clashing Influence of Father and Brother

With the experienced, conservative influence of Father working on one side and the excitable, curious influence of Sam working on the other, Tim spends much of this novel trying to come to terms with their points of view and to find his own point of view through them. This is one of the reasons why the Verplancks trip is so important; it shows the thought process Tim undergoes when he is completely alone, away from these two strong and omnipotent influences. Alone, he considers which person would handle the situation in what way, and how he as his own man ought to handle it.

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Motif

Foretelling Death

Foreshadowing is used frequently in this novel. Often, one character warns another of a very specific threat of war and winds up being the one facing that threat and losing to it. Sam professes that one should die for one's cause, and he dies for his cause. He predicts a problem with cattle thieves, and he turns out to be framed for that problem. Father warns Tim of diseases on prison ships, and he himself is the one to die of disease. This works to show that no preparation or wisdom can protect a person during terror-filled and chaotic wartimes. Even careful observation and prediction cannot act as a shield, and Tim himself, the most inexperienced of all and the recipient of so many of these ironic warnings, is the one who actually cannot foretell, yet lives.

Weather

The most significant events in this story work in a concert with the weather. Spring, traditionally a time of youth and hope, also sets up spring-lovers for disappointment, for inevitably winter will come. It is April when Sam first delights Tim by returning from college, then fights with Father and leaves for good. Spring the next year gives Tim a chance for some glory of his own in the letter-delivery, but it fails, and he feels puzzled and left out of the war once again. A year later, also in April, the British troops come through, giving Tim an initial feeling of camaraderie with one side. Eventually, though, the troops horrify Tim with their unnecessary cruelty, and later that day, Sam returns. In this novel, spring events are most disappointing because they hold out hope and then dash that hope to the ground.

Symbol

Telling Points

One of the things Tim most admires about Sam is Sam's ability to succeed in college debates with "telling points" that shake any argument in his favor. These telling points rarely work against Father, who is accustomed to trusting in his own set of rhetoric to get his way, but they never cease to impress Tim. They are a symbol of Sam's scrappiness, and his ability to remain on his toes and combat what attacks him in an easy and graceful manner. When Sam learns that he is going to die, he jokes ruefully that he didn't score enough telling points.

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Betsy Read

The only significant woman in the story besides Tim's mother, Betsy is very important as a war barometer. She is prohibited from fighting, but overcompensates for this by trying to be as involved as possible in helping Sam and the rebels to win the war. She lingers around the tavern eavesdropping, she wrestles a potentially dangerous letter away from Tim, and finally, when she has lost all hope in the cause, her despair gives us a clue that something horrible is going to happen. When the Rebels and Sam are strong, she supports them fully, and by the very end when she loses her patriotism, it indicates that her cause—Sam's success in the war—will not rise triumphantly again.

**SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS**

Chapter One

Summary

Sam, Tim Meeker's admired older brother, arrives in uniform at the Meeker tavern one rainy April evening in 1775. "We've beaten the British in Massachusetts," Sam exclaims, beginning a fight with Father, who is staunchly loyal to the English government and king. Sam explains to the people around the table how the Minutemen lay a surprise attack on the British "Lobsterbacks" (named for their red uniform coats) in Lexington. Sam basks comfortably in all the attention. Father asks him a series of skeptical questions, including who fired the first shot. Sam does not know who fired first.

The dinner guests, the minister Mr. Beach and several farmers, all support England, and they take Father's side, arguing with Sam about the cause, questioning whether the loss of thousands of lives is worth saving a few pennies in taxes. Sam insists that America should fight on principle, and soon Father loses his temper and bangs the table. Tim keeps quiet, but thinks of the frequency of these fights between Sam and Father. Sam has been educated at Yale and is always triumphant, full of facts and fervor, but Father still always seems to know best.

After dinner, Tim goes to milk the family cow, Old Pru. Sam refuses to help, worried about soiling his uniform. Sam eventually joins Tim, saying Mother had reprimanded him with her usual sort of godly advice, saying "idle hands make the Devil's work." Tim asks questions about Sam's wild times at Yale, his experiences with alcohol and girls. Through a practiced guise of feigned uninterest, Tim prods his older brother to confide in him about the war. Sam admits that he has joined the Rebel side under the leadership of Captain Benedict Arnold and that he has returned home to take Brown Bess, a bayonet gun that belongs to Father. The news about the gun horrifies Tim, who doesn't want any more conflict between his brother and his father. But as Sam has sworn him to secrecy and Tim takes swearing and religion seriously, he cannot reveal Sam's secret.

Feeling torn and impotent, Tim goes up to bed and waits for Sam to join him. He wakes in the night to hear Father and Sam arguing. Sam demands the Brown Bess and Father refuses, speaking of his own war experience in a sad, wise speech. He tells of carrying his best friend's body back to his parents in a sack, and says quietly and ominously that he doesn't want to receive Sam's body in a similar fashion. He asks Sam to lose his cause or

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leave the house. Sam leaves, and Tim hears the sound of Father crying. Tim knows that the coming times will be hard ones.

Analysis

The focus is on Sam in the first chapter. His arrival on the scene opens the narrative and the personalities of the family come clear through their reaction to Sam's tale. Father displays blunt practicality, telling Sam to shut the door to prevent rain from coming in the house before he properly greets his son. Mother says little, but welcomes him in, relieved to have him home from college. Tim, the youngest Meeker son and the first person narrator of the story, notes with admiration and some envy how proud Sam looks in his uniform. Sam, showing his own love of glory, ignores his family's reactions and bursts forth with his own glorious news about Lexington.

When Father asks about the order of shots, we see an early glimpse of his ability to understand the actual principles and futility of war. This contrasts with Sam's less informed involvement, which is based more on a zealot's ideal of causes and glory than it is on experience. Later, when Father and Sam argue about the Brown Bess, Father speaks confidentially to Sam about the awfulness of war as he saw it. During all of this, Tim simply listens, setting his own role in the story as one caught between loyalty to his father's desire to avoid the war, and Sam's desire to live gloriously and dangerously.

The appearances of religion in the first chapter show us one facet of the family's beliefs. When Tim milks Old Pru he daydreams, but acknowledges that daydreaming is sloth and sloth is a sin. During a joking conversation between Tim and Sam in the barnyard, we can see that the Meeker family has been raised on firm ideas about what is godly and right, ideas originating from the Church of England. By joining the Rebels, by extension Sam joins in a fight against the Church of England. The war is not a tangible fright to the people of Redding, but it is a religious scandal which is just as threatening as the idea of war. Tim himself cannot yet imagine the war, and has not had to test his faith in the fairness of life and religion. Tim still has complete confidence in Sam's judgment.

Chapters Two–Three

Summary

Chapter Two

Tim explains the religious background of the town of Redding. People built their houses according to the church they attended, either Anglican or Presbyterian. Tim's family lives in

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Redding Ridge, which signals that they are Anglicans and therefore loyalist. Tim does not feel he is particularly tied to the loyalist or Rebels, which worries him. Tim goes to church and sits in the balcony, hoping to escape thoughts about Sam, but as soon as he arrives his friend Jerry Sanford mentions Sam. Then Mr. Beach, the preacher, gives a sermon on Sam's departure to fight.

After church, Tom Warrups, an Indian who lives nearby, confides to Tim that Sam is currently staying in his hut. Tim makes up an excuse to his father and darts away to speak with Sam. He finds Sam sitting inside the teepee, holding hands with Betsy Read, his girlfriend and the granddaughter of Colonel Read, a prominent local Patriot. Tim hesitantly reasons with Sam, telling him of Father's tears in hopes that Sam will give up the war and go back to college. Sam is silent for a moment but still steadfast in his decision. Betsy Read asks Tim whose side he is on, a question that Tim evades by saying he does not fully understand either side. Sam speaks again of principles and the Patriot spirit rising in the cities outside of Redding, and says, "You should be willing to die for your principles." Betsy agrees and says she would fight on Sam's side, given the chance. Sam and Betsy try to persuade Tim to eavesdrop on conversations in the tavern to help the Rebel cause. Tim is uncomfortable with this request and says he must go. He his father's Brown Bess gun and he pleads with Sam to return it. Betsy asks Tim if he wants Sam to get killed. Sam asks Tim not to tell, and Tim promises not to. He begins to cry and departs for home.

Chapter Three

Tim speaks of the effects of the war on his home life. He had thought the war would bring battles and great change to his quiet Connecticut village, but it has not. There are no marching armies, no cannons, no food shortages. There is just lots of talk about the war, as there always was. Occasional the arguments get heated, as when Father throws a man out of the tavern for subversion, by which he means criticism of the British army. Betsy often stops by to listen to conversations, but Tim's mother always shoos her along.

Once Betsy pulls Tim aside and asks if he would tell his parents if Sam returned to Redding. Tim says that he would not, and then he waits for a signal from Betsy that Sam has returned. One month after another passes, but no word of Sam comes. Tim works hard during this time and becomes very strong in arithmetic, all the while waiting for Sam to return so that he can impress him with his new skills and hard work. Finally, one November day, Betsy comes to the tavern and nods furtively to Tim, who knows this means that Sam has returned.

Analysis

In the second chapter, we see how Tim is a product of his age and upbringing. When he sits in the balcony for church, he explains without question or judgment that the balcony is

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where the children, Indians, and black people sit. He does not give much thought to this, an unconcern that is realistic, for in Revolutionary times, racism was considered normal and acceptable. Tim is a well-behaved child, and does as he is told. He believes in God and keeps Sam's secrets in accordance with what he has been instructed to do.

Tim understands what he is supposed to believe and do, but he does not always understand why he is supposed to believe and do certain things. Tim says he knows God can punish sinners if he wants to, and he hopes God does not decide to punish Sam. In conversation with Sam inside the teepee, Tim expresses his lingering anxiety about not taking a side about the war. Even though both Betsy and Sam voice Rebel propaganda, Tim feels skeptical about Sam's easy acceptance of the war and miserable at feeling compelled to side either with his brother or his father.

The war starts to become a more tangible threat in Chapter Three. Tim begins frequently employing the phrase, "Oh, I don't mean that," because he feels mixed, confused sentiments about the war. Tim is unwilling to spout maxims or generalities, because he does not believe in any stance wholeheartedly. His caution makes us believe in him as a credible, honest narrator. Tim starts to contrast with Sam, who races to uphold his beliefs and positions and knows exactly what he believes.

While Tim waits for Sam's return, his desire to win Sam's approval never wanes. Tim misses Sam and his boasts and stories, and he wants to boast in return of his "finally being able to throw a stone clear over the tavern...and about being best in school in arithmetic." Some of the most prominent thoughts in Tim's mind concern small ways to please and impress his older brother. Even with Sam away at war, Tim never entirely sheds his role as the younger brother. We also see Betsy's involvement in the rebel cause in the third chapter. Although as a woman, Betsy is not permitted to fight or help in any way, she is determined to help Sam nonetheless, and constantly attempts to eavesdrop at the tavern for any news that could help Sam.

Chapters Four–Five

Summary

Chapter Four

Tim racks his brain to think of an excuse to get away so he can visit Sam. As he chops wood, Tim sees a troop of Rebel soldiers clad in blue uniform, approaching the tavern on horseback. Tim follows them to the tavern, cracking open the door to see his mother held up at gunpoint and his father trying to wrestle his way out of the grip of several soldiers

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who are holding him and demanding his gun. Father tells them that Sam took it. The Rebel soldiers threaten to kill him if he does not give them the gun. Father argues vehemently, which makes Tim think that he understands where Sam got his rebelliousness. When a soldier loses his temper with Father and slashes him across the cheek with a sword, Tim realizes that he must act quickly. He dashes out of the kitchen and runs to Tom Warrups' teepee, where he knows Sam is hiding.

Tim finds Sam sleeping with the Brown Bess in his arms. Knowing Sam to be a heavy sleeper, Tim carefully moves Sam's arms, gets the gun, and sneaks away. Sam wakes and chases Tim, catching Tim and demanding the gun back. Tim surprises himself and his brother by turning around and aiming the gun as steadily as he can, threatening to shoot if Sam comes any closer. Sam stares at him, Tim begins to cry, and Sam lunges at the gun, slicing both his finger and Tim's as he takes back the gun. Tim explains the situation and begs Sam to run home with him to check on Father. Sam resists at first, but reacts when Tim accuses him of cowardice. Sam loads the gun, and Tim pauses to admire his brother's casual ease with the Brown Bess. When Tim and Sam arrive at home, the soldiers have left. Sam and Father face each other. Father calls, "Come back, Sam," and Sam runs out of the yard and is gone.

Chapter Five

By January of 1776, Tim has yet to see any actual fighting, but the effects of the war are becoming visible. Food and guns disappear quickly, and soldiers steal cattle all across the countryside, desperate to feed themselves and their troops. Tim says the worst part of the war is missing Sam, worrying about him, as envying him his glory. Tim realizes that in the eyes of a younger brother, everything an older brother does seems brave and grown-up, even milking the cow. Tim acknowledges that cow-milking was hardly glorious when his own turn came, and he wonders whether fighting in the war really is as glorious as it seems. Tim imagines himself on the battlefield and wonders which side he would defend.

One April day, Mr. Heron and Tom Warrups visit the Meeker tavern. Mr. Heron asks Mr. Meeker whether Tim would run an errand carrying some business letters for him. Mr. Meeker is immediately skeptical, but Tim volunteers enthusiastically, hoping for an ounce of his own glory so he can boast to Sam. Mr. Heron says everybody must make sacrifices for the war. Father says no, adding that he has already lost one son and refuses to lose another. When Mr. Heron says that Mr. Heron is an ambiguous, shadowy political figure and that Tim ought not to get involved with him. Tim obeys, but for the next day he feels envious of Sam's glory and angry at Father for holding him back. He confronts Father and demands a chance to participate in the war effort and help either side—he doesn't even care which. Father says no and stands angrily, and suddenly he stops. Tim knows this is because Father drove Sam from the house by shouting, and does not want to drive Tim away too. Instead of shouting, Father asks Tim to stay uninvolved, and warns him of the prison

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ships into which the soldiers often throw children. Two weeks later, Tim and Jerry Sanford go fishing, and Tim plans to use fishing as an excuse to sneak away and run Mr. Heron's errands.

Analysis

When he hears that Sam is home, Tim tries to find a clever way to escape Father in order to visit Sam. Soon, however, Tim's domestic worries shift and he must concern himself with more dangerous problems. He must concentrate on finding the best way to help Father escape the fury of the Rebel soldiers. He ultimately does this by running to Sam. When the Rebel soldiers enter the tavern, Tim fears for his father, who talks back to the soldiers, as he always fears for Sam, who talks back to Father. The might of Tim's father suddenly seems unimpressive in contrast to the might of the Rebel army. This diminishment of Father is a significant change in Tim's untested view of the world. Tim's loyalty to Sam does not stand in the way of his determination to fetch the gun and save Father from death or capture. Tim begins to see his father differently, seeing Father's fallibility and determining to protect him, even at the risk of upsetting Sam.

The Rebel army becomes a less sympathetic force than it was in Sam's description. In person, the Rebels do not seem like the sympathetic underdog characters fighting the mighty British army. Rather, they are threatening, untrusting, and unforgiving. Still, Tim excuses their behavior, understanding that with Redding's reputation as a Tory town, it makes sense that the Rebel soldiers would storm through and disarm the citizens in order to mitigate their own weapon shortage and prevent the Tories from rising on their own to fight.

One of the most significant passages in the novel appears Chapter Four, when Tim uses his intimate knowledge of Sam to disarm him. Tim knows exactly how to handle his sleeping brother. Tim and Sam are bound by brotherhood, and it is disquieting to see that bond used by one brother to disarm the other. The authors seem to be pointing out that war forces brothers to turn against each other in desperation. Tim also plays on his brotherly knowledge of Sam to press the exact button—Sam's unwillingness to be thought a coward—that will coerce Sam into returning home to ensure that Father is left alive by the soldiers.

In Chapter Five, cattle thieving becomes common. Tim becomes aware of the illegal and dangerous possibilities surrounding him, but he does not yet apply these scenarios to the people in his own life. Father checks himself, having learned through his painful experience with Sam the consequences of losing his temper with a son. Father controls himself in a rare instance of self-policing, emphasizing his own wisdom and vulnerability, but not curbing Tim's persistent desire to do something that will sound adventurous when he recounts it to Sam. For the first time in the story, Tim has a sense of control over his Father, something that feeds his confidence and desire to prove himself.

Tim's desperation to participate demonstrates the depth to which he makes decisions based on whether they will win Sam's attention and respect. Tim is conscious of his own need to please Sam. He thinks about the nature of younger brothers' admiration for their older brothers. This thinking is uniquely Tim's, because it comes from his own experience, not Sam's or Father's. Although Tim fears and usually obeys Father, he still adores Sam, and this adoration is the reason why Tim ultimately decides to sneak out against his father's will. Mr. Heron, recorded both in history and in this story as a shady figure, offers adventure to Tim. Tim decides he wants to set aside his own skepticism and forge ahead, Sam-like, and try to contribute.

Chapters Six–Seven

Summary

Chapter Six

Once Tim has decided that he wants to run Mr. Heron's errand, he waits for an excuse to see Mr. Heron. Within two days, this excuse comes when Mr. Heron orders a keg of rum from the tavern and Father sends Tim to deliver it. At the delivery, Tim volunteers to run the errand. Mr. Heron asks Tim to set out with a letter the following morning. The next morning, Tim tells his father that he will be fishing all day. He goes to see Mr. Heron, who explains that he must deliver a letter to Fairfield, which is a five-hour walk away. While walking, Tim runs into Betsy, who spies the letter and begins to tease Tim about it being a love letter. Tim lies and says he is going fishing, thinking that he hates lying and lying is a sin. Betsy tells Tim that she is going to visit Sam. Tim is shocked to hear this. Betsy evades his questions about Sam's whereabouts and experiences, declaring smugly that Tim is a Tory and therefore doesn't deserve to know. Tim does make her tell him that the source of her information about Sam was Mr. Heron, and Tim wonders aloud why Mr. Heron said nothing to him about Sam that morning.

Betsy immediately deduces that Tim is carrying a letter for Mr. Heron, and she demands to have it, fearful that it is a spy report that would endanger Sam. Tim refuses to believe her or give her the letter, fearing he may get thrown in jail for opening the letter to check. Betsy counters that Sam may get killed if he does not open the letter. She lunges for him and the two fight bitterly, hitting each other. Betsy wins the fight, snatching up the letter and running. She reads it and discards it on the road. Tim follows her and picks up the slip of paper, which reads, "If this message is received, then we will know that the messenger is reliable."

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Chapter Seven

Throughout the summer of 1776, Tim manages to avoid Mr. Heron after failing to deliver his letter. Soon Tim forgets about the whole thing. Food is still short, but the Meekers are not in dire straits. They receive two letters from Sam speaking of high spirits but bad living conditions. Mother and Father argue about whether to respond to him or not. Father says Sam should not be given the impression that they approve of his betrayal. When the second letter arrives, Mother points out the irony that Father hates people telling him what to do, yet he insists that Sam respect his authority. Mother decides to write, regardless of Father's disapproval. November nears, and Father needs to make his annual trip to Verplancks Point to sell cattle and stock up on supplies for the tavern. He consults almanacs, trying to time his trip close enough to winter that the buyers are desperate for cattle, but not so close that snow will plague the journey. Usually Sam makes the trip with Father, but this year Father takes Tim, even though he considers him too young for such a long and difficult trip.

As they set out, Tim enjoys the young children watching him. He is proud to be doing an adult task. Father and Tim are stopped in Ridgebury by six "cow-boys," armed cattle thieves. The cow-boys ask Father where he is going with his cattle and then remind him that Verplancks is in British-occupied New York, and his beef will go to feed the enemy army. They speak roughly to Father, calling him "Tory" and demanding that he get off his horse. The cow-boys then send Tim away to a field while they beat Father on the head with their pistols. Just as Tim cries out to them not to shoot his father, several Loyalist horsemen arrive on the scene and scare the cow-boys away, then escorting Tim and his father to their relatives' house in New Salem.

Analysis

When Tim tries to deliver the letter for Mr. Huron, we see his fundamental innocence. He is a bad liar and therefore a useless messenger in wartime. He cannot help blushing when asked questions that he does not want to answer, and he belies his thoughts and sentiments, musing aloud about why Mr. Heron did not tell him about Sam's arrival at home. Betsy, quick and suspicious, catches Tim, and the entire trip fails. Before the war began, Tim never had occasion to develop sneakiness. Betsy, on the other hand, has grown up in a patriotic, war-involved family, and she instinctively understands and distrusts spies and messengers. Betsy's war expertise has perhaps saved Tim from a dangerous obligation to Mr. Heron, although we can never know for sure how Tim's job would have evolved had he succeeded in delivering the test message to Fairfield.

It is intense loyalty to Sam that lands Sam's brother and Sam's girlfriend in a nasty physical fight with each other. Tim's desperation to impress Sam is countered and ultimately defeated by Betsy's desperation to keep Sam safe from what might have been a spy message. Their fight indicates only a shared adoration of Sam. This scene reinstates the extent to which

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Sam is a driving force in the lives of the people who know him, admire him, and love him. It also gestures at his carelessness, for he does not seem to notice what other people go through in order to dazzle and protect him. The message sequence also reveals the strangeness of Mr. Heron's character. Mr. Heron is a real person who was thought to be a double agent in the Revolutionary War, but nobody is certain of his role. In this novel, he is another example of the muddled state of the two sides, suggesting that nobody can be entirely trusted, and the sides are not clearly defined or separated.

After having failed to squeeze an adventure out of Mr. Heron's errand, Tim spends the summer feeling sheepish and uninvolved. The war still does not have much to do with his immediate surroundings, although he knows from the goods shortages and letters from Sam that the war is raging through other parts and other lives. Although Father and Sam conflict more than any other two characters in the novel, Father's responses to Sam's letters reveal how similar the two men are. Both left home at age sixteen, both are extremely stubborn and headstrong, and both deal uncertainly with seeing their own traits in each other.

The trip to Verplancks Point is a surprise adventure to Tim. Sam has always made the trip with Father, and now Tim, filling in as oldest son, has his chance. Father is extremely reluctant to bring Tim with him, which suggests he foresees the dangers that lie ahead. Tim thinks the trip will be a welcome change. When they pass younger children at home, Tim enjoys feeling admired rather than admiring: "It made me feel proud of myself for being a man while they were still children, and I shouted at the oxen and smacked them on their rumps with my stick, just to show off how casual and easy I was with oxen and how used I was to managing them." This scene echoes the moment when Tim admires Sam's familiarity with the Brown Bess. Here, showing off his expertise with the oxen, Tim feels the pleasure of being watched the way he has always watched Sam.

The confrontation with the cow-boys is frightening, most of all because Father refuses to comply with their demands. Tim had been warned of something like this happening, and although he and Father are saved just in time by the escort of Loyalist patrolmen, Tim is frightened by seeing his father helpless against these armed men. Tim is treated like a child and sent to sit in a field away from his father and the oxen. He is excluded from the situation, but he listens and learns. The journey to and from Verplancks Point spans three of the fourteen chapters in the novel. In the first part of the journey, Tim ceases to be a child doing chores at home, and ceases to be isolated from the war. The journey marks the moment when Tim leaves the safety of childhood and is forced to grow up quickly.

Chapters Eight–Nine

Summary

Chapter Eight

Tim meets his cousins, the Platts, for the first time. Four girls sleep in a tiny clapboard house and the two boys sleep in the barn. Tim feels grateful to have grown up in the tavern, which always had plenty of room for himself and Sam to sleep comfortably. In a cozy scene, the Platt family, Tim, and Father sit around a fireplace. Tim observes that he felt shy about meeting them, but they do not feel shy, because they are in their house. Mr. Platt and Father discuss the disintegration of law in many of the colonies, the threat of the cow-boys, and the open hostility between Tories and Rebels. Father defends Redding, saying that law and order still reign. Tim falls asleep and is soon taken up to bed by his cousin Ezekiel. The two boys speak of the war. Ezekiel criticizes Sam for joining the Rebel forces, and Tim stands up for Sam. Ezekiel asks Tim which side he would fight for if he had to, and Tim replies, "The loyalist, I guess." As he falls asleep, though, he imagines the horror of finding himself pitted in battle against Sam.

Father and Tim leave early the next morning and have no more trouble as they approach Verplancks Point, thanks to escorts along the way. Tim is impressed by the size and beauty of the Hudson River, and astounded when they arrive in Verplancks and see the widest part of the river and the fisherman in their skiffs. He watches the fishermen with interest but sees that they look dirty and exhausted by the end of the day. The trade is successful, and the Meekers spend the night in a tavern before continuing on their way home. They plan to take a long, safe way home, but snow begins coming down and they know they must get themselves and their oxen home as soon as possible. The oxen are already uncomfortable, slow and bawling from the snow, so Tim and Father stop finally to stay the icy night with the Platts.

Chapter Nine

When Tim and Father depart from the Platt house, the snow has covered the land and the ground is slippery and hard to travel. Their escort home has not met them, due to the heavy snowfall. They trek on, Tim behind with the cattle and Father riding ahead on his horse to check on the safety of the road. Tim feels frightened and lonely, but he keeps going. The Meekers make it through Ridgebury with no problems. But they do not feel entirely safe yet, and Father rides up again to scout the path ahead. He takes longer than usual, and Tim passes the time by naming all of the countries in the world, stumbling over whether to count America, finally deciding not to. Tim begins to worry and think of possible reasons

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why Father has not returned yet, but he knows that none of his excuses are true. Tim tries unsuccessfully to speed up the oxen, then leaves them next to the road and jogs along, following Father's horse's tracks.

Tim comes to a space where the horse's tracks are surrounded and intermingled with tracks of many other horses and then trail away on the road. Tim knows instantly that Father has been ambushed by the cowboys. Tim prays, then panics, and runs into the woods to hide, trying to decide what to do. He wonders what Sam would have done, and concludes that Sam would do the brave, daring thing, which would be to rescue Father. It dawns on Tim that the bravest thing is not always the smartest thing, and he wonders what Father would do. Father would take the goods back home so that their tavern could make it through the winter. Tim runs back to the oxen and thumped them into motion.

As he moves along with the cart, he knows that the cow-boys will return, and slowly forms a plan for dealing with them. Night falls, and soon Tim spies three tall figures blocking the road ahead of him. Tim cries out, "Are you the escort? Am I ever glad to see you." The cow-boys ask what he means by talking about an escort. Tim feigns fearlessness and trust in them, and explains that his father called an escort in case the cow-boys came to harass them. The cow-boys begin to argue about whether to stay or leave. They want his goods, but they do not want to get ambushed by the coming escort. A dog barks, spooking them, and they flee. Tim begins to laugh and cry with relief and triumph. He has saved his family's goods, he has acted bravely and smartly, and he has a great story to tell Sam. He continues traveling through the night until he arrives home in Redding.

Analysis

Tim travels a significant distance away from his home territory for the first time when he goes on the trip with his father. This distance allows him to gain some perspective and appreciate his own life. He sees his cousins, who must sleep in crowded rooms, and sometimes in the barn, and he feels grateful for having grown up in the tavern, with warmth and room to sleep comfortably. Tim finds himself standing up for Sam when his cousin Ezekiel criticizes Sam for joining the Rebel forces, even though Tim himself generally wishes Sam had made different decisions. Away from his usual context, Tim is able to define himself and his opinions by consulting the information he has gathered through new experiences. He recognizes that with his family position, he would probably wind up fighting on the Loyalist side, but he also recognizes that his loyalty to Sam brother makes him uneasy about shooting any Rebel, knowing that it could be his own brother, or anyone's brother.

At Verplancks Point, when Tim watches the fishermen, he has another experience of observing new surroundings and winding up being grateful for his own lot in life. The river is wide and sparkling with excitement, and Tim wishes that he could have the chance to live here and work as a fisherman all day on these waters. After watching the fishermen

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pull in their boats and sit cold, tired, and hungry on the shores, however, Tim realizes that their work is not as glamorous as it seemed initially. Tim begins to identify with his home, work, and family after thinking about it and choosing to do so, rather than unthinkingly, by default. This new thoughtfulness is one of the crucial elements of Tim's developing manhood. Chapter Eight marks a crucial moment in Tim's ability to assume control and responsibility for his life at home. Before the journey, Tim frequently had to make excuses to escape from his father's sight, whereas after the journey, Tim has to be in charge and figure out on his own how to face the reign of war as it closes in upon his town.

Chapter Nine examines the opposing influences of Sam and Father on Tim. While Father rides up ahead and Tim leads the cattle alone, he passes time by naming all the countries in the world, a game that reveals his thought process. Tim acknowledges to himself that if the Rebels win the war, America will be a country, not a colony. Then, however, he thinks of his father's certainty that the Rebels will lose, and so he discards America as a country. This thought process is typical, for Tim often thinks first of Sam's opinions, and then of his father's.

When Tim realizes what has happened to his father, he considers what Sam would do and what his father would do. Tim wants to act bravely, as Sam would, but then he makes the important distinction between being brave and being smart, and he does what his father would have wanted. Although he is influenced by his father, however, Tim forges a solution to his problem using cleverness and ingenuity that are solely his, and not based on Sam or his father. Mr. Meeker speaks evasively and stubbornly to the cow-boys on the journey out, so we can assume he would spoken in the same way on the journey back. Sam would have risked his life to save Father, perhaps getting killed in the process and almost certainly losing the cattle. Tim does neither of these things. When he reads the tracks and instantly understands the situation, it is a turning point. His intuition sharpens, and he begins to come of age. He seals this step in his maturation when he lies easily to the cow-boys, outsmarting them and arriving home safely with the supplies. The cattle trip begins as an exciting adventure, but it turns into a frightening and test of manhood. Tim succeeds by facing the cow-boys just as resourcefully as an intelligent, experienced adult could have hoped to do. Tim's life has lost its playful, imaginary element. He is done with trying to sneak away in search of stories to tell Sam. Without looking for excitement and danger, he has found both. Although it makes him proud to have triumphed, Tim now sees firsthand that the dangers involved are hardly worth the risk.

Chapters Ten–Eleven

Summary

Chapter Ten

With neither Mr. Meeker nor Sam at home, Tim and his mother must work overtime to keep up the tavern. Mrs. Meeker tells Tim not to worry, that God will forgive them for working Sundays. Tim thinks to himself that he was not worried. Business at the tavern is good, but because money is short, many people pay in commissary notes that will only have any value if the Rebels win the war. Mrs. Meeker has a discussion with Colonel Read, who has lost hope in the Rebel cause. Colonel Read mentions that Sam might not even be allowed to return home. Tim finds that since returning from Verplancks Point, he has felt a new responsibility for the tavern, a drive to do chores well, and an unwillingness to postpone work. He excitedly imagines showing off his knowledge of the tavern and its upkeep to Sam. Still, Tim misses his father and resents Sam's willingness to shirk family responsibility.

Winter passes, and on April 26, 1777, Tim hears an alarming thundering noise. He overhears a local black man named Ned telling Captain Betts that the noise is British troops marching in. Captain Betts sends Jerry Sanford to alert Mr. Rogers, another local Rebel. Tim notes how impressive the British army is, uniformed and spanning a mile on the little dirt road. He watches several officers go into Mr. Heron's house. Tim talks to an Irish member of the British army, and when the soldier asks why Tim is not afraid of him, Tim replies that his town is mostly Tories. Tim realizes as he speaks that he counts himself a Tory after watching Father's kidnap by Rebel cow-boys.

Events speed up and grow more violent. The officers break into Captain Betts' house as Tim watches in fear. The British seem organized and ready to move on when a Rebel messenger appears at the top of a hill and is shot down by the British. Colonel Read helps carry the bleeding men into the tavern and sends Tim to Dr. Hobart's house. Tim runs the two miles there through the woods. He is almost there when he hears gunshots, and drops into the woods to hide. From his hiding place, he observes the British army surrounding Captain Starr's house, where Starr and several other rebels, including Ned, are firing at the army. As Tim watches, the British enter the house and massacre the Rebels. Tim vomits when he sees Ned's head jumping in the air, sliced off by a British sword. The British soldiers burn the house and bodies, and as Tim continues to Dr. Hobart's house, he loses his sympathy for the British side and the Tories.

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Chapter Eleven

Back in the tavern, Dr. Hobart removes the bullet, and the wounded Rebel messenger seems all right. Before passing out from all the rum he drank as an anesthetic, the wounded messenger tells the people in the tavern that Captain Benedict Arnold was preparing to bring his army through Redding in pursuit of the British. Tim knows Arnold is the leader of Sam's troop, and he hopes that Sam will return with them. Captain Betts runs into the tavern saying that the British let him go but kept Jerry Sanford. This puzzles Tim. Captain Betts tells Tim to ring the church bell to alert the town, but Mrs. Meeker forbids it. Tim is relieved, for he no longer wants to be involved in the war. Mrs. Meeker prays and then begins preparing dinner. Several Rebel officers burst in the tavern, demanding food and rum. One of these officers is Benedict Arnold, and upon seeing him, Tim races to a group of soldiers in front of the church across the street and asks for Sam. One soldier sympathizes with Tim and brings him inside, where he and Sam reunite, happily and tearfully.

Tim tells Sam about their father's capture. Sam knows, and has already tried unsuccessfully to get him out of prison. Sam hides in the barn and Tim runs inside and signals Mrs. Meeker to follow him outside. Tim brings Sam food, which he eats like he is starving. Mrs. Meeker tries to persuade Sam to return home after his enlistment ends in two months. Sam refuses, saying he has promised some of his friends in the army that they will all would stay in it until the British are beaten. Mrs. Meeker begins to argue with Sam, but Tim warns her that arguing will not change Sam's mind, and she falls quiet. As Tim says goodbye to his brother, he notes that for the first time he knows that Sam is wrong about something. Tim understands that despite Sam's hard soldier's life, Sam feels fulfilled by being part of something greater than himself. Tim suddenly feels like Sam's equal, not his little brother.

Analysis

Tim's loyalties and principles shift a great deal in Chapter Ten. Religion, an ever-present force in the Meeker family, becomes less important to Tim. He has real responsibilities and worries, and bothers less with his worries about sin. He begins to think most about taking care of the tavern, and stops thinking so much about God. Anglican principles, such as not working on Sundays, seem unimportant compared to the more immediate fears of starvation and poverty. It is not that Tim squelches his guilt; he does not even feel guilty to begin with. The Meeker business becomes Tim's responsibility, and he speaks with a new responsibility and interest about running it. He puts aside his childish way of grudgingly doing chores at the last minute and leaving the greater decisions to his parents.

Tim's loyalty fluctuates from one extreme to the other. His experiences place him in contact with both British and Patriot soldiers, and neither group impresses him. After seeing the Rebel cow-boys take away his father, Tim feels confident telling the Irish soldier that he is a Tory. When Tim sees the British soldiers taking his friend, Jerry Sanford, into captivity,

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Tim grows more skeptical, wondering what the soldiers would want with a small boy. At the end of Chapter Ten, when he watches the British soldiers break into Captain Starr's house and massacre the men inside, Tim realizes that he cannot fully support the British any more than he can the Patriots. Both sides act horribly and desperately. Tim understands this and realizes he does not want to take a side. He simply wants to protect himself and his family until the war ends. Tim's attitude at the end of Chapter Ten is very similar to the attitude Mr. Meeker has always had toward the war. Tim is no longer enchanted with zealotry or the idea of joining something potent and collective and great. Tim's ideas drift farther and farther apart from Sam's. Slowly and through painful experience, Tim is creating his own wisdom and practicality that has nothing to do with his brother.

Still, Tim's attitude toward Sam does not change significantly. Although Tim takes on his new role with mature energy, he still thinks with a childish smugness about the ways he can impress Sam with his expertise about the running of the tavern. Although Tim feels mature and indispensable in his new position of responsibility, he still resents Sam for being away "playing soldier boy" while Tim is at home working hard. The surgery scene at the beginning of Chapter Eleven is comforting, because it suggests that people can treat each other with decency even if they are fighting for different sides. Dr. Hobart cares for the wounded Rebel soldier in Meeker tavern not because of the man's affiliation, but because he is a human in pain. The goodwill shown to the unknown Rebel soldier, as well as the optimism about his healing process, are a relief after the recklessness and murder pervading the brush with war in the previous chapter.

We see that Tim has outgrown the war when he feels relief at his mother's refusal to allow him to go to the church and ring the bell. Tim sides with his mother and his absent father. He no longer wants adventure, he just wants to stay uninvolved in what he now sees clearly as someone else's war. To Tim, patriotism is not as important as safety. To Sam, in contrast, the glory of independence trumps other concerns. Tim finally sees Sam, who has become a true man of war. Sam looks skinny and ragged, eats ravenously, and is firmly determined to remain with the cause until its end. Although his soldier's lease will expire in two months, Sam has decided to reenlist, attributing his decision to a promise he made to several other soldiers to fight until they win. Mrs. Meeker finds it appalling that Sam would choose loyalty to a few soldiers he has just met over loyalty to his family, which badly needs him at home. Tim agrees with her, but does not argue. His maturity shines through in this chapter when he recognizes the finality of Sam's decision and does not fight it, even though he disagrees. Tim realizes that his reunion with Sam placed him in the position of Sam's equal. He no longer blindly follows Sam's judgment; he does not even trust Sam's judgment at all anymore. The events that turn Tim away from war fuel Sam's fixation with war, a fundamentally different reaction. Tim Meeker has grown enough and seen enough to judge for himself that Sam's reason for fighting is not justification enough for the sacrifices he might have to make.

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Chapters Twelve–Thirteen

Summary

Chapter Twelve

In June of 1777, Tim and his mother find out that Mr. Meeker is dead. He died of cholera on a prison ship, and his last words were that he loved his family and forgave Sam. Two days later, Tim finds out that Jerry Sanford also died on a prison ship, and the soldiers buried his body at sea. Mrs. Meeker says war turns men into animals, a phrase she will repeat several times. Even Betsy, who vehemently supported Sam's efforts, no longer cares who wins the war as long as it ends soon. Conditions are worsening for the soldiers and the civilians. Mrs. Meeker quotes her husband, saying that "In war, the dead pay the debts for the living." She says sadly that her husband did not expect to have to pay. Tim has lost sympathy for both sides.

Tim continues tending to the tavern. Prices are rising and merchandise is short, and everybody is buying things on credit. Tim has eight cows as pay from people who owe him money, and is debating about how to make the greatest profit from them. Tim is constantly hungry. In the winter of 1778, Sam returns, looking emaciated and shabby, but still grinning and happy to be home. He tells his family that he will be nearby until the spring, and warns them of cattle thieves. He speaks of the horrors of the war and how the men involved are hardened by it. He admits to stealing cattle when desperately hungry. Tim asks whether the army punishes stealing, and Sam answers that his leader, General Putnam, will hang anyone for it as an example to the rest. Sam advises Tim to butcher their cattle and freeze it in the barn over the winter, but Tim hesitates, still hoping to sell them.

For the next few weeks and months, the officers remain in Redding and come to the tavern for rum. Sam returns as often as he can, continually pressuring Tim to get rid of the cattle and speaking of the exhaustion of the soldiers. One evening as Sam sits talking with Tim, the two brothers hear strange noises outside. They dash to the barn and see that four cows are missing. Sam follows the tracks while Tim ties up the remaining cows. Within minutes Sam returns, tied up and held by the two cattle thieves, who had overpowered him and were reporting him to General Putnam as a cattle thief.

Chapter Thirteen

Tim runs to Colonel Parsons to proclaim Sam's innocence. Colonel Parsons is asleep, and his men instruct Tim to return the next day. Tim goes to tell his mother the news. She has an awful foreboding feeling and insists that they pray together. They kneel in prayer

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before going outside, cutting up the dead cow, and herding the three remaining ones into the barn. When Tim finally speaks with Colonel Parsons the next day, he learns that General Putnam wants to make an example of someone. Mrs. Meeker dresses warmly and goes to speak with General Putnam. Betsy Read visits the tavern, and when she hears the news she promises to ask her father to speak with the officers in charge. In the evening, Tim's mother returns, deeply sad, and says that Sam's situation seems hopeless. The cattle thieves framed Sam efficiently, and Sam was supposed to be on duty at the Betts' house instead of outside or at home. Mrs. Meeker drinks two glasses of rum while she speaks, and throughout the next few weeks she begins to drink more and more.

Colonel Read tells Tim that several other men are to be tried in front of a jury along with Sam, but that the trial is not necessarily fair. During the weeks before the trial, Sam is locked in a cabin and forbidden to see anyone. Sam is found guilty, and sentenced to be shot and killed. Mrs. Meeker is unsurprised. Tim feels numb, and runs to talk again with Colonel Parsons, who believes Tim but is not very empathetic. Finally, Parsons gives Tim a note to see General Putnam. Tim gets to speak only a few sentences to the General, proclaiming Sam's innocence, before being cut off with the excuse that the General's time is valuable. General Putnam says severely that he will consider his case, and that Tim can see Sam if they stand six feet apart. Tim is brought to a wooden hut, and a guard brings Sam to one of the holes in the wall. The brothers speak briefly, and Tim tells Sam that his case is being considered. Sam seems interested, but not hopeful. Sam is relatively humorous and upbeat, managing to grin before the guard takes Tim away.

Analysis

After hearing the conformation of his father's death, Tim truly takes charge of the tavern. He must make his own decisions about its upkeep knowing that they are permanent, not a stopgap measure until Mr. Meeker returns. When Tim and Sam disagree about what to do with the cattle, it is the first time Tim's opinion stands above Sam's regarding household decisions. Tim hesitates and disregards his brother's advice, hoping for a good deal on the cattle. Sam's insight about cattle thieves is sound and born out of experience. Sam has suspected that someone would try to steal the cattle, and admits that even he has stolen before to feed himself and his friends. Sam, like his father, predicts certain awful inevitabilities about the war, but never thinks that he himself will be a victim of the disasters he anticipates. Both Sam and Mr. Meeker must pay war debts they did not expect to pay. Father lived through his own war experience but was taken prisoner during his son's war. Sam was not caught when he actually stole cattle, but framed when someone else did.

The combination of Tim's indecision about the cattle, Sam's boldness in running after the thieves, and the cattle thieves' simple terror of being caught and executed, combine to doom Sam. It seems brutally unfair that Sam, who so longs for glory, reaches a crisis point entirely free of camaraderie, glory, or romance. The authors seem to be gently pointing

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out the youthful foolishness of assuming that your wartime experience will bring you glory and honor. Sam survived every battle and hardship, but he cannot survive the fussy and underhanded bureaucracy of his own side. He is wrongly convicted as an example to the rest of the men. In these chapters, Tim has his first longed-for chance to show off his tavern-running expertise to Sam by opting against slaughtering the cattle, and he fails catastrophically. He harms not himself or his tavern but his brother. Like any adult, Tim has done his best to make a good decision, but has chosen wrong.

Chapter Thirteen deals primarily with the hierarchies of armies and their lack of concern with the death of an individual. Sam has served his side loyally for three years and yet when he is caught in a suspicious situation, his good track record is forgotten. To even speak with the officers, Tim must beg for permission, wait hours on end, plead his case repeatedly, and simply hope for good luck and good timing. The meetings with Putnam and Parsons show Tim only that military high-ups consider themselves too important and busy to spend time defending or sympathizing with their men.

The trial is predetermined according to the whims of people in charge. It does not operate on a system of fairness or actual inquisition into facts and histories. Putnam needs a scapegoat, and Sam's life is worth nothing to him. Tim and Mrs. Meeker are helpless in the face of General Putnam's decision, and their repeated efforts to free Sam only emphasize how thickly guarded and quick to judge the officers of war have become. The men with whom Tim deals lack emotion, and we sense that Sam never belonged with them in the first place. He is a passionate, loyal, loving man, and he has an idealism these officers lack.

The changes in Mrs. Meeker show how the strain affects her. She loses hope entirely and hardens more than she did after her husband's death. Seeing her son placed in such a dire and unjust situation breaks Mrs. Meeker's heart and leaves her silent and vacant. She finds comfort in drinking. Tim responds by acting practically and pressing on in his mission to free Sam. Tim does not mention feeling responsible for Sam's capture, but he steps fully into the responsibility of helping Sam escape his unlucky and unfair fate. Oddly enough, the person who seems most calm about Sam's sentence is Sam himself. He seems resigned to what will happen and he understands it, given the smart lies told by the cattle thieves and his absence at the Betts' house. He is even able to make jokes, keeping up his demeanor and courage. We admire Sam here more than ever, as he makes the valiant effort to bolster his own and his brother's morale.

Chapter Fourteen & Epilogue

Summary

Chapter Fourteen

General Putnam refuses to consider Sam's case again. Sam is to be executed with other convicted criminals on Tuesday, February 16. Tim weeps when he hears the news and fury wells up inside him. The Sunday before the execution, the entire town is required to go to a church service praying for the souls about to be executed. Mrs. Meeker refuses to go. Tim goes but leaves in tears in the middle of it. That night the Meekers close the tavern early because they have no customers, and Mrs. Meeker says she wants to close it forever. She has sunk into deep depression. When Tim pulls his father's bayonet off the mantel and begins to sharpen it, Mrs. Meeker says in a soft voice that he would get himself killed, and that he might as well, so that both her sons could go at once.

Tim leaves the house without a plan, and without feeling cold or sad or anything other than a simple determination to help Sam. Tim wonders whether prisoners about to die worry about keeping warm, and concludes that they probably do. At the encampment, the guard is asleep. Tim considers killing the sleeping guard and unlocking the prison doors. He thinks to himself that if Sam can kill people, so can he, but when he has a clear shot, Tim is unable to take a life, and without thinking he runs. The prison guard wakes and shoots him, grazing his shoulder. Tim calls for his brother and hurls the bayonet into the air, hoping it will land on the side of the wall where Sam awaits his execution. After running away, Tim realizes that Sam is no longer in the stockade. He returns home quietly, hides his bloody shirt, cleans his wound, and goes to sleep.

Tim attends the execution, although his mother does not. It is set on a hill near the encampment, and Tim watches as the prisoners are brought up in front of the watching public. Sam gives Tim a small grin as he passes. Tim watches the hangings, and then Sam's turn comes. A bag is placed over his head and he is led in front of the gallows, several feet away from the soldiers who were about to shoot him. When the muskets are poised for fire, Tim cries out, "Don't shoot him!" Shots ring out, and Sam writhes on the ground, jerking, on fire from the shots and still alive. Quickly, one of the soldiers shoots again and Sam stops moving.

Epilogue

Tim records the date of the story he has written. It is now fifty years after the United States was founded and forty-seven years after Sam was shot. Tim says he has had a happy life and

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a wonderful family of his own, after moving to Pennsylvania with his mother and opening up a new tavern there. Mrs. Meeker never got over Sam's death, and until she died of old age, she spoke of his headstrong ways to her grandchildren. Tim wonders whether his great and prospering nation could have been formed without the loss of so many lives.

Analysis

Chapter Fourteen consists of two parts. The first is Tim's response to the news of Sam's execution date, a reaction first of sadness and then of anger and determination to fight against the sentence, even at the risk of his own life. Tim acts coldly and bravely but without any plan, and his plans fall flat when he cannot bring himself to shoot the soldier or find Sam's prison. Sam is the fighter, not Tim, and even when Sam's life is at stake, Tim knows that it is not within his human capacity to kill a person—perhaps because he feels so keenly the tragedy of knowing that one he loves dearly is about to die. Tim vaguely believes that he can still save Sam and acts boldly but without reason, and with a certain warlike passion, in contrast to his mother's pessimistic stoicism.

The second part of this chapter begins when Tim returns home, cleans his wound, and goes to bed, realizing that there is nothing more he can do. Sam's death is going to happen, and Tim accepts this, then falls asleep without further plans or contemplation. On the day of the execution, Tim observes without emotion or judgment. With a matter-of-fact description, Tim reports what he sees: Sam's head covered by a sack and the guns' distance from his body, and finally, the sound, the fire, and Sam's jerking body. Tim ends the chapter with the simple observation, "Then he stopped jerking." Tim has prepared himself for this and faces it without tears or drama, as if he too has hardened himself to the effects of the war. Tim allows his love for his brother to gain hold one time, breaking his silence with his last hopeful cry not to shoot.

In the epilogue, Tim summarizes the rest of his life, which has been a long, happy, and peaceful one. Tim admires and appreciates American independence, and does not venture to judge whose time was better spent: Sam's, which he spent fighting for this freedom but not living to enjoy it, or his own, which he spent skirting the fighting but reaping the benefits of the fighting. Sam's effect on Tim's life has not been forgotten, as we know through his mother's nostalgic stories about her oldest son. The ending note of the novel is appreciative of a long good life but rueful and speculative, as Tim wonders whether the loss of life was worth independence.

1. "Stop complaining," I said. "I have to do this every night while you're down at Yale scoring telling points and getting drunk with those girls." "You know I wouldn't do anything like that, Tim. Drunkenness is a sin." I giggled. "So is—what's that word for girls? Lasviciousness?"

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"Lasciviousness, stupid, not lasciviousness. I have a new song about girls, but it's too lascivious for you."

This dialogue is a prime example of the dynamic between Sam and Tim. Both boys have heard many times from their parents that certain behavior should be avoided as sinful, and their ability to laugh about this shows their similar view of the use of religion. Tim's recollection of his brother's college stories show how avidly he listens when Sam speaks. Tim's giggle betrays the pleasure he takes in hearing that Sam does things of which their parents would not approve. Tim's stumble over the word "lasciviousness" demonstrates his own youth and inexperience in contrast with his brother. Sam's humoring of this mispronunciation and withholding of the song shows his relative power over his brother, his ability to dispense information at his desire to a listener who will no doubt find it fascinating.

2. I let go of the gun and took my hand out from underneath the blanket, trying to think what to do next. Sam was pretty tired, and being a good sleeper, I figured I might be able to move his arm without waking him up.

This quotation shows the betrayal of friends and brothers that war can necessitate. Tim needs to take the Brown Bess, his father's gun, back home, and when he finds Sam sleeping with it, he uses the intimate information he has of his brother's sleeping habits to decide he will take a risk and slide the gun away from Sam. Even though Tim has no intention of hurting Sam, this passage portrays a trespass of sorts, and demonstrates how in war, men must use any resource they can find to survive.

3. I asked myself what Sam would do if it were him...he'd do something daring. The most daring thing to do would be to track down Father...Then it came to me that even though rescuing Father was the daring thing to do, it wasn't the smartest thing. So I asked myself another question: what would Father do?

For the entirety of the story, Tim is caught between the opinions of his father and the opinions of Sam. He finds qualities of both in himself, yet he is never old enough or clever enough to compete with either, and he does not feel entirely similar to either. Much of the plot follows Tim's growth from being an observer of actions to being an actor himself. In this quotation we see the working of Tim's mind as he confronts a situation that he does not know how to handle. His mind jumps first to what Sam would have done, since Sam is the closest figure to Tim and the object of Tim's most immediate admiration. However, although Sam's decisions are usually glorious, they are rarely safe or wise. Father, on the other hand, is a very practical-minded man about a great many things, and Tim considers his actions as well. Finally he decides on a plan which contains all the courage of Sam, all the practicality of Father, and an ingenuity that is Tim's own.

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4. *In war the dead pay the debts for the living.*

Tim's mother quotes Father as saying this, and notes that he himself never expected to have to pay. This is perhaps one of the wisest lines in the novel, and it repeatedly shows itself to be true. Both young Jerry Sanford and young Tim Meeker have gotten involved in the war to a dangerous extent, and it is simply a matter of timing and circumstance that Tim lives through the story and Jerry does not. Father took his own chances during involvement in a war before Tim and Sam were born, but he does not have to pay his debt for years. He dies during Sam's war, a time when he believed himself safe and uninvolved. Sam notes at the beginning of the novel that one ought to die for one's cause, and he understands at the end that his turn to pay has come. This quotation marks the unfairness of war, in which many are involved, but not everyone involved dies. The unlucky ones die on behalf of all those involved. People like Time and his mother are left behind, alive but empty from so many personal losses.

5. *I knew he was wrong. He was staying in the army because he wanted to stay in the army, not because of duty or anything else...[k]nowing that about Sam gave me a funny feeling. I didn't feel like his little brother so much anymore, I felt more like his equal.*

Tim speaks these words after Sam comes home and refuses his mother's plea for him to stay home. For as long as he can remember, Tim has fallen short of Sam's strength, courage, intelligence and experience. Tim's idolatry of Sam remains constant through much of the story. Even when Tim becomes the man of the tavern, performing adult tasks and making important decisions, he still looks forward to the moment when he can show off his new knowledge to Sam. This quotation marks the first time when Tim deeply disagrees with Sam. Tim has discovered a fundamental truth about Sam: once Sam has become part of a group that might achieve glory, no amount of arguing or persuasion could rip him from the group. Usually Tim argues just to act as a foil for Sam, but this time he sincerely believes that his brother's decision is wrong. Having learned this, Tim is finally able to understand that his own rationale is as sound, if not sounder, than that of his older brother. This realization shapes his developing adult personality.

**FULL TITLE**

My Brother Sam is Dead

AUTHORS

James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier

TYPE OF WORK

Young adult novel

GENRE

Wartime fiction, coming-of-age novel

LANGUAGE

English

TIME AND PLACE WRITTEN

Early 1970s, United States

DATE OF FIRST PUBLICATION

1974

PUBLISHER

Scholastic, Inc.

NARRATOR

Tim Meeker

POINT OF VIEW

The narrator speaks in the first person, noting his observations of the war and his brother's involvement

TONE

Matter-of-fact; conversational; sometimes childish

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TENSE

Past

SETTING (TIME)

1775–1779; epilogue, 1826

SETTING (PLACE)

Redding, Connecticut and nearby areas

PROTAGONIST

Tim Meeker is the narrator and the person whose actions and growth we follow most closely throughout the novel, although his observations and concerns are very often centered on his older brother, Sam

MAJOR CONFLICT

Tim struggles to understand the war and define his own set of opinions based on the opinions of his father and brother

RISING ACTION

Sam joins the Rebel forces; Tim is left alone to drive the cart home from Verplancks; the British attack Redding; Tim realizes that Sam is fighting for the wrong reasons

CLIMAX

Tim realizes the certainty of Sam's execution and runs out with his late father's bayonet, hoping somehow to stop it. The climax is actually a moment of quiet and defeat in Tim's life, for he realizes that he cannot kill other men, and that his efforts to save his brother are futile

FALLING ACTION

Tim resigns himself to attend his brother's public death with the understanding that he cannot save Sam

THEMES

The illusion of glory; the degeneration of values during war; the clashing influence of father and brother

MOTIFS

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Foretelling death; weather

SYMBOLS

Telling points; Betsy Read

FORESHADOWING

Foreshadowing occurs three times when characters make warnings about situations that eventually play a part in that characters' own death. Sam claims that a person should die for his cause; Sam warns Tim of cattle thieves and notes that General Putnam may hang the next person he catches; Father warns Tim about prison ships and the circulation of cholera

**STUDY QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED ESSAY TOPICS****1. *What effect does the war have on Tim's acceptance of his religion?***

When the story begins, Tim frequently berates himself for actions such as daydreaming or lying, actions that he considers sinful. He notes in church that God can punish anyone he wants to punish, and for this reason Tim fears that God will punish Sam by letting him die in the war. As the story progresses, Tim's worries about God lessen and he begins to worry more about practical matters like the mechanics of the tavern, or how to escape the cow-boys. This practicality is shown clearly right after Sam has been taken away as a cattle thief, when Mother wants to pray and Tim simply wants to collect the dead cow before someone else takes it away. At Sam's death, Tim tries to pray, but is unable to, and the idea of prayer falls out of his mind when he sees his brother drawn up the hill and shot. Once the urgency of the war has ended and time has passed, Tim looks back on his life and speaks of the happiness he has been granted "with work and God's will," a sentiment that suggests he has regained his religious conviction. However, he says it with a subtle deliberation of phrase, as if to suggest that he decided to practice religion but did not have much use for it after its uselessness in the war. The ending leaves us to wonder whether Tim believes that God has given him, but not Sam, a good long life, or whether he believes that he and Sam simply created their own endings.

2. *Thematically speaking, is there a reason why Sam has to die and Tim has to live?*

In terms of the novel's project, it is necessary that Sam become one of the war's victims in order to show that the war can swallow up even its most dashing and bold participants for the most inane reasons. Sam's death also shows the futility of glory. We assume that Sam fought with valor and strength, but we see that he dies in the least glorious way possible. Tim, the admirer and onlooker, has assumed the role of recorder of facts and impressions, and must act in relatively safe ways in order to provide a foil for the more extreme hero, Sam. Like Ishmael in *Moby Dick*, or Nick in *The Great Gatsby*, the narrator lives on the outskirts of the action and lets the hero take center stage.

3. *What is Tim's ultimate take on the war? Does he ever decide which side has his loyalty?*

By the moment of Sam's death and the end of the story, it seems that the British side has offended Tim the least. Although Tim vomits as he watches them lop off Ned's head and take away Jerry, his run-ins with the Rebel army affect him in the most profound ways, since they take away his father and his brother. By the end of the novel, Tim has ceased to

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expect anything from either army and he draws into himself, realizing that both sides will commit crimes of hatred and desperation in order to gain on the other. When we see Tim at age sixty-four, he feels pride at living in a free country, but he also seems to value the quiet life he lived in prewar America. In a way, independence has affected Tim very little, other than having taken away so many of his loved ones. Tim is perhaps not loyal to either the British or the Americans; rather, he is deeply loyal to safety and tradition, and to Sam. His only political conviction is the hope for peaceful isolation.

Suggested Essay Topics

4. *In what ways do the roles of older brother and younger brother change or remain constant throughout the story?*
5. *Describe how Tim's own coming of age parallels the wartime "coming of age" of the United States. Which influences shape each progression?*
6. *Which death or series of deaths seem to apply most to Father's saying that "In war the dead pay the debts of the living", and why?*
7. *Betsy Read is the only woman in the story to express a desire to help the Rebel cause. Why do you think the author does not write about more women characters?*
8. *In what ways do the characters in this story foretell or cause their own deaths? Do the characters generally die in a way that reflects the way they lived?*

**REVIEW AND RESOURCES****Quiz**

1. *What did Betsy first suspect Mr. Heron's envelope to contain?*
 - A. Patriot military plans
 - B. A secret family recipe
 - C. A love letter
 - D. Loyalist military plans
2. *For what crime was Sam convicted?*
 - A. Badmouthing the general
 - B. Stealing cattle
 - C. Abandoning his post
 - D. Getting in a fight
3. *Where does Sam hide when he must keep a low profile in Redding?*
 - A. Tom Warrups' hut
 - B. Betsy Read's attic
 - C. Dan Starr's house
 - D. The church loft
4. *What profession enchants Tim when he arrives at Verplancks Point?*
 - A. Farming
 - B. Trading
 - C. Fishing
 - D. Weaving
5. *What does Sam want Tim to do with the eight cattle?*
 - A. Name them
 - B. Hide them
 - C. Keep them until a good offer comes along
 - D. Butcher them

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6. *What does Sam score so many of in college?*

- A. Football goals
- B. Telling points
- C. Top-notch grades
- D. Poker chips

7. *Who kidnapped Father?*

- A. A band of cow-boys
- B. Rebel officers
- C. Tory officers
- D. Jerry Sanford

Answer Key:

1: C

3: A

5: D

7: A

2: B

4: C

6: B

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Edition Notes

Note: This Sparknote refers to the Scholastic, Inc. edition of *My Brother Sam is Dead*. The novel is divided into fourteen chapters, an epilogue, and an appendix. This edition is reprinted entirely from the original Four Winds Press text.

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